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CENTRAL INTELLIGENCE AGENCY  
OFFICE OF NATIONAL ESTIMATES

2 February 1971

AFRICA STAFF NOTE NO. 1-71 (O/NE Distribution Only)

SUBJECT: Reflections on the Uganda Coup

1. While the dust is far from settled on the recent military seizure of power in Uganda, at least a few of its implications are already discernible. As the first coup in Black Africa in over a year, it has aroused more than the normal amount of attention and comment from Black African countries. Further, it marks the downfall of one of the area's more radical heads of state who had just played a noisy role at the Commonwealth Conference in Singapore. But ex-President Obote's strong stand against British plans to sell arms to South Africa had little or nothing to do with his loss of power.

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2. The coup itself appears to have been a hastily improvised defensive measure taken by Maj-Gen Idi Amin -- the new head of Uganda -- to counter President Obote's effort to oust him. General Amin has since made the usual charges about tribal favoritism, corruption, economic difficulties and lack of democracy in the previous government -- all of which are true -- to justify the takeover. He has also promised eventual return to civilian rule, pledged respect for international treaties, and professed his desire for good relations with practically everyone.

3. Amin is regarded as more moderate and pro-Western than Obote but his ability to organize and run an effective government is questionable. The General rose from the ranks and is popular with the troops and many junior officers, but factionalism within the army mirrors the divisions within the country and Uganda -- a congeries of hostile tribes -- is difficult to govern under any circumstances.

4. It is too early to predict what domestic policy changes the new regime will make or how popular it is likely to be once the euphoria over Obote's downfall wears off.

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The Baganda -- Uganda's largest and most advanced tribe -- will hope for the power and benefits denied them during their long years in the wilderness under Obote. They will probably be difficult to control and placate. Moreover, the government is in financial trouble, thanks in part to Obote's recent lavish spending. At the outset the Amin regime will have few funds with which to meet competing tribal demands. In general, whatever combination of tribal groupings gains ascendancy, internal politics are likely to be even less stable under Amin than under Obote.

5. The external ramifications of this coup are surprisingly extensive. Radical African leaders are sharply disappointed at the loss of one of their more vocal and rising stars. For them, this is the most traumatic coup since Nkrumah's downfall in 1966. President Nyerere of Tanzania has publicly denounced Amin as a rebel and asserted that Obote remains the lawful Ugandan president. Nyerere has given Obote asylum and assisted his campaign to deny recognition of the new regime. Obote has visited Kenya and Ethiopia and may be seeking Sudanese military aid. He

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probably is also looking for sympathy from the Somali and  
Zambian governments. Obote's charges of Israeli and other  
(read British) foreign instigation of Amin's coup fall on  
receptive ears among radical African leaders and will increase  
their suspicions of the West. But the non-recognition campaign  
is almost certain to fail.

6. Ethiopia appears quietly delighted at this turn of  
events. It expects Uganda to sympathize with the rebels in  
southern Sudan and perhaps to aid them. Such pressure on  
Sudan could, in turn, divert Sudanese attention from Ethiopia's  
own troubles with the dissidents in Eritrea. Since Amin has  
had fairly close contact with the Israeli military technicians  
who are training the Ugandan army, the Sudan is probably  
worried that Amin might permit stepped up Israeli contacts  
with the rebels. In any event Sudanese-Ugandan relations  
are likely to be further strained over the next months, and  
the usual border clashes involving refugees and rebels may  
increase.

7. Perhaps the most serious repercussions of the coup  
lie in its effects on the fragile East African Community

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(EAC) -- which provides a common market and common services to Kenya, Uganda and Tanzania. Obote usually sided with Nyerere in intra-EAC disputes and President Kenyatta's patience was often taxed in the effort to hold the arrangement together. Now that Nyerere has publicly denounced Amin and harbours Obote, the whole structure is endangered, along with hopes of broadening the community to include neighboring countries. On the other hand, the service functions of the EAC -- transport and communications -- could easily be maintained even if the heads of government refuse to speak to one another.

8. Kenya disapproves of military coups, partly because they can be contagious, yet it is pleased to see Obote replaced by someone more to its liking. If Amin's conciliatory attitude towards Tanzania continues and Nyerere accepts some face-saving excuse to resume relations with Uganda, the power balance in the EAC is still likely to be in Kenya's favor. If Nyerere remains adamant, Kenya and Uganda could maintain effective ties but the EAC would be in for some very rough

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sledding. In any event, Tanzania and Zambia, the remaining radicals in the area, are likely to draw closer together.

9. The coup will probably have little affect on Uganda's or East Africa's relations with countries abroad. Obote's nationalization program is likely to be slowed or stopped -- but not reversed. Uganda may get along a bit better with the UK and with the US; a bit worse with the USSR and China. But the main impact of the coup will be confined to Eastern Africa, where the gulf is widening between moderates and radicals.



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